



FEMALE TRIBAL FOLK AND FOREST, A MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED TRIBES OF HAZARIBAGH DISTRICT IN JHARKHAND

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ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to assess the contribution of forests on livelihood generation of female tribal folk of Jharkhand and it also highlights the sustainable practices of these indigenous tribes used in preserving and conserving forests which is transmitted to generation after generation especially by the female folks of these tribes in Jharkhand. This paper discusses the types of forests products produced in Jharkhand its role in strengthening the economic and cultural identity of rural female tribal workforce. It also highlights the role of the rural female workforce in enriching their culture and ensuring their existence by conserving the forests and also helping to maintain this practice by transmitting the idea of forest conservation and sustainable practice to the coming generations.

KEYWORDS: Non Farm Products, Sustainable Development, Livelihood opportunities, Agro forestry.

INTRODUCTION:

The State of Jharkhand in Eastern India has 5 divisions and 24 districts and approximately 28% of the population is 'tribal' and are among the poorest population of the country. In India there are almost 645 types of scheduled tribes and out of these 30 tribes are in Jharkhand. This is why Jharkhand is one of the highest tribal populated state with approximately 60% of population being tribal. Jharkhand is a state that carries a green identity and forest plays a very critical role in the lives and livelihoods of tribal people and especially to the women folk. It plays a pivotal role in livelihood of tribal people living in and around forests. Women are closely associated to the forests and hence they are the worst victims of deforestation. Association of women and forests are not only important from the point of view earning livelihood but also because they realize and understand the importance of forests for their survival, therefore they adopt and depend on the sustainable means of livelihood. At every level of preserving, carrying and transmitting these traditional indigenous know how from one generation to another is the task of a women. The state of Jharkhand is very rich in biodiversity and has a tribal identity that carries their traditional knowledge since ages.

The tribal folk basically depend on their immediate environment to meet most of their basic needs and women folk among them possess a deep appreciation of the environment and forest which help them to form the decision making in daily life. Connection of tribal women is very strong and deep rooted because of the importance of forest based gathering and women's control over income has given the identity of heads of households. With reduction in forests this identity is also reducing day by day as economic development and modernization is demanding the sacrifice of flora and fauna causing more and more damage to these forests and causing damage to the ecological balance. There is a dire need to increase the sustainable practice to promote afforestation and preserve the green identity of the states. This sustainable practice of preserving the forests has been taught for thousands of years by the indigenous tribes and they have better environmental management and the tasks of transmitting these ideas are mostly carried by women in the family. This makes it quite evident that these tribal women folk are very modern and practical and visionary as they have always realized the role of forests in the survival of an individual. The realization of the importance of forests for the livelihood options for female forest dwellers and identifying the importance of women in preserving and carrying traditional knowledge to obtain present development is also very important. It is also very important from the point of view of generating livelihood opportunities and reducing rural poverty, biodiversity conservation leading to rural economic growth. These tribal folks mostly depend on these forests for their income.

OBJECTIVES:

1. To find out the role of forests in generating the livelihood opportunities for tribal women in Jharkhand.
2. To find out the role of women in understanding the usage of flora and fauna and transmission of know how generation after generation.

METHODOLOGY:

The present paper is based on primary as well as secondary data which has been collected from articles, journals by the first explorers, archaeologists accounts, some reports by the anthropologists, magazines, books and periodicals to obtain historical and other types of information on the selected region in order to draw conclusions about the importance of indigenous perspective regarding sustain-

able development and forest conservation. Data collection has been done using the ethnographic data collection methods (i) Narrative Inquiry (ii) Personal Observation. The demographic record of the female tribes, their habitations, their livelihood are recorded to understand their socio-economic condition. The homogenous sampling method was used to understand the specific aim of describing the life of rural tribal women. Data collected are mostly based on the past memory of tribals so it may lead to inaccuracy. Although attempts have been made to make the data reliable. The study is based on a particular location and hence it should not be generalized for other locations.

Role of forests in generating livelihood opportunities for female tribal workforce:

The rural tribal population in the area of study mainly depend on forests for their livelihood and they earn a substantial income from the forest products. The forest products are mainly tendu leaves, Mahua flowers, honey, beeswax, shikakai, turmeric etc. These resources are extracted for personal consumption and also for commercial purpose. the demand for these forest products are seasonal and solely depends on the natural growth and regeneration of these products which makes the productivity quite unpredictable. As the male tribal folk have the opportunities to move out and opt for better job opportunities in nearby towns the female tribal folks are mostly dependant in collecting these forest products to generate income for themselves. Collecting and selling these forest products is one of the important source of income for these female tribal folk and it also contributes to their food and livelihood security. It increases the purchasing power of the rural female tribal population and enhances their access to better living. These female dwellers have better understanding of certain medicinal plants, dyes, mushrooms, fruits, resins, bark roots, leaves, flowers, seeds, honey and many more products that can be extracted from the forests and sold for their living. These are the better sources of food as well as livelihood security. The mahua flower is one of the luxury of these local dwellers which they also use as medicine and procure drink from it to be used and sold in local markets of Jharkhand. These products have great potential as they can enhance sustainable rural development and also diversify rural economic growth. It also endures the cultural richness and is also good for environmental health. Some of these products have low cash values therefore its popular to be used for self consumption rather than being sold in the market. Some of these products earn good prices to local female dwellers as they have high commercial value and they are available at low cost as they are mostly found on common property lands.

In India where more than half of its population is residing in rural areas and have a large tribal population base and with most of its rural tribal female workforce being illiterate economically weak and have no or less opportunities for livelihood generation these forests play a major role.

Role of women in understanding the usage of flora and fauna and transmission of know how generation after generation:

It has its own environmental, economic and cultural value too. The forest conservation leads to agro forestry. Cultivating new species of forest products finally contributes in generating biodiversity. Forest generates livelihood opportunities specifically for female tribal workforce in Jharkhand. It is a source of some major non timber farm products like herbal medicines, natural dye, wood work, honey etc. Some of them even made entry into the world market too.

These practices of forest conservation is passed from generation after generation through the tribal female folks plays an important role in passing out this knowl-

edge to generations. It has its own cultural importance. Preservation of forests is mostly done by these tribes as a way of living. The field of herbal medicine or ethno medicine has a great scope of research and its growing rapidly. It not only helps in preserving forests but also helps in preserving the culture. These tribal forest dwellers not only depend on these forests but also understands the importance of these forests in their own survival. Therefore they preserve these forests by sustainable practices that leads to save the biodiversity as they are their major source of income. They pass on these sustainable practices to the coming generations so that their source of income as well as their culture is saved and their existence is ensured.

Despite of modernization and development forests still remains an important source of livelihood generation and cultural preservation for rural tribal folks in Jharkhand. The rural farm income is quite uncertain therefore the non farm income sources are also very important for livelihood generation in rural Jharkhand. Although these nonfarm forest income are mostly seasonal in nature it helps in supporting the rural livelihood opportunities for lean off agricultural seasons. Rural female tribal's have very low family annual income and have very less amount available for their necessities. Therefore the improvement in the livelihood of these forest dwellers will bring an increase in their earning.

Various agro forestry based industries are flourishing and providing livelihood opportunities to many people in the local regions. Tendu leaves supports the bidi making factory, broom making units are also working in these localities. Honey and bee wax business and local dye and liquor shop made out of mahua flowers are also the reason for the development of many small production units and are the source of livelihood generation to the local people. The female tribal folk are dwelling in the nearby forests and working for 5-6 hours daily. During the season their income rises and vice versa. This leads to increase their income and also lead to women empowerment.

The contribution of forests in livelihood opportunities and especially of female folks is that most of the tribes are landless and jobless with low literacy. With availability of small farms and low production the production of crops are mostly done for household consumption. Therefore the contribution of agriculture to the cash income is also very low therefore they depend on forest dwelling for their additional income. Moreover for tribal's not having agriculture land forest dwelling becomes the primary activity during the certain periods of the year. It not only helps in generating livelihood opportunities for tribal women folk it helps them to earn cash income and make them empowered. Being a way of living for these tribal folks it also leads to their economical as well as cultural strengthening and finally contributes in forest conservation.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION:

These forest dwellers collect forest products all year round while most of the products are seasonal in nature. Forests produce various products and are a major source of livelihood, food, income and cultural security to these rural tribes. Despite of its importance availability and prices of these forest products varies across regions and fluctuate their commercial value. The market for these products are quite complex and quality control by buyers also effects their prices. Therefore there is a strong need for government intervention so that a regular monitoring and scientific management could be planned. Besides these female folk should also be educated about the market and marketing linkages to ensure better earning. Scientific studies should be carried out to assess the impact of extraction from forests and their effect on ecosystem. Sustainable ways of harvesting and procuring should be brought in practice more and more.

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